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Exploring the Impact that Mentorship has on College Preparedness

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INTRODUCTION

College preparedness is an important topic within educational research. Scholars have not yet come to a consensus on how college preparedness should be defined, but previous research has noted the significant impact that an individual's high school experience can have on their ability to prepare for college (Farmer-Hinton 2008; Glater 2016; Holland 2006; Reid and Moore 2008; Wimberly and Noeth 2004). Often students who are involved in extracurricular activities and complete advanced coursework in high school are more prepared to transition into higher education (Conley 2008; Glater 2016; Reid and Moore 2008). Furthermore, low-income and first-generation students require additional support from their high schools because they often do not receive information about college from their family members (Farmer-Hinton 2008; Glater 2016; Gullatt and Jan 2003; Holland 2009; Reid and Moore 2008; Wimberly and Noeth 2004). Therefore, it is important to examine the ways that high schools support or fail to support students as they prepare for college.

In this study, I interviewed 18 Bridgewater State University students from Brockton, Taunton, Fall River, and New Bedford, four small cities in southeastern Massachusetts. The purpose of this research is to confirm whether or not the qualitative data collected in this study mirrors the findings that previous researcher have found. The data collected from these interviews emphasizes the significant role that extracurricular involvement, advanced coursework, and college preparedness programs have on preparing students to transition into college. Students who

have the opportunity to develop one-on-one relationships with high school faculty and staff that provide them with academic and social assistance are often better prepared to transition into college. Therefore, the data collected in this research reinforces the significant role that high schools can play in preparing students for the transition into higher education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous research has shown that college readiness is best examined through multiple lenses, including a student's academic coursework in high school, his or her involvement in enriching extracurricular activities, and his or her understanding of the college process (Glater 2016; Glennie *et al.* 2014; Holles 2016). Conley (2008) argues that students must have sufficient knowledge about "college culture" in order to succeed in higher education. They need to understand the application process, financial aid, and how to choose a school that fits their needs. Once they are enrolled, they must understand how to communicate with their professors, how to access academic resources, and how to manage their time in order to achieve academic success. Arnold *et al.* (2012: vii) also found that "college readiness" was best defined as "the multidimensional set of skills, traits, habits and knowledge that students need to enter and succeed in college." Therefore, college readiness cannot merely be measured through an individual's academic ability, because one's preparedness for college is impacted by multiple factors including academic performance, social skills, and college knowledge (Conley 2008).

Previous research has also shown that preparing for college is particularly challenging for low-income and first-generation students. First-generation students often do not receive assistance from their parents when preparing for college because their parents have had limited experience with college planning, as well as the application and financial aid processes. Holland (2009:25) found that "underrepresented students rely [solely] on their secondary schools for college preparation and guidance because they often have parents who have not completed college." When

students do not have immediate family members who have attended college, it is imperative that their high schools provide them with the information and support that they need to understand their options as well as how to navigate the college application process. Gullatt and Jan (2003:9) further explain the benefits that pre-college access programs can have for first-generation and low-income students. They explain that “these programs [are designed] to provide a student with high potential, but limited resources, with the support necessary to reach his/her individual academic goals, including college admission and enrollment.” For first-generation students who cannot rely on their parents for college support, these preparation organizations are invaluable resources.

College preparedness is important to explore in urban communities specifically because research has shown that these students are typically disadvantaged in the education system. Holland (2009:25) explains:

Students are less likely to have access to the human and material resources that are critical for college preparation. These students are less likely to be enrolled in academically rigorous courses or college preparatory tracks; and, the schools that many of these students attend have been less likely to provide students with sufficient opportunities to develop relationships with high school personnel who are solely responsible for guiding students through postsecondary planning activities.

Holland (2009) argues that students who attend urban high schools are at a disadvantage because the school often cannot provide the same access to critical college resources that smaller suburban schools can. Researchers have noted the significant role that extracurricular involvement, academically rigorous coursework, and access to college information plays in helping students to prepare for college. However, Holland (2009) notes that students in urban high schools are typically disadvantaged on all of these fronts.

Therefore, it is important to understand how students navigate this high school environment and what impact their high school experience has on their ability to prepare for college.

One-on-one relationships with high school staff and faculty provide students with the opportunity to ask questions about college and receive personalized assistance through the application process. Reid and Moore (2008:243) concur as their research concluded “that strong social and academic support networks are necessary for successful transition from high school to college”. Farmer-Hinton (2008:128) argues that these mentoring relationships are particularly important for first-generation students:

Students rely on their school networks where school leaders and teachers with collegiate experiences can supplement familial and local networks that have limited collegiate experiences. Besides the appropriate courses and academic support, students need the benefit of school networks to reinforce college expectations and provide college-planning tools and resources.

Therefore, first-generation students benefit greatly from relationships with high school staff and faculty who can supplement the knowledge about college that students cannot receive from family members. In her research, Farmer-Hinton (2008) found that students who lacked important knowledge about the college application process and college expectations were able to achieve their academic goals with the support of their high school social networks. Students who received guidance from teachers, counselors, and other school staff shared that their mentors made post-secondary education attainable. This research highlights the important role that high schools can play in preparing their students for college.

Previously published research has shown the important role that one’s high school experience can have on one’s ability to prepare for college. The academic and social supports that students receive

in high school lay the foundation for later success in college. Based on published data, students who are mentored by their guidance counselors, extracurricular advisors, and teachers are more prepared for their transition into higher education. Additionally, first-generation students are often particularly reliant on their high schools to provide them with guidance and experience to prepare them for college because they cannot use their parents as resources.

METHODOLOGY

For this qualitative study, 18 in-depth interviews were conducted with Bridgewater State University (BSU) students who graduated from an urban public high school in either Brockton, Taunton, Fall River, or New Bedford. Participants for this study were recruited primarily through convenience and snowball sampling methods. Because only specific urban communities were targeted for this study, I used convenience sampling methods to contact potential interviewees whom I knew personally through my involvement with different organizations on campus. Information about the study was also published on the BSU class pages on Facebook in an effort to access additional participants. Once some participants had agreed to be interviewed, snowball sampling methods were used to gain access to additional participants. All interviews were conducted at Bridgewater State University (BSU) in Bridgewater, Massachusetts between June and October 2017.

This sample consisted of 18 total participants, 12 of whom identified as female and 6 who identified as male. 10 interviewees graduated from Brockton High School; 1 graduated from Taunton High School; 2 graduated from B.M.C Durfee High School in Fall River; 4 graduated from New Bedford High School; and 1 interviewee graduated from a public vocational school in New Bedford. When asked to identify their race, 8 respondents identified as white; 7 identified as black or African American; 2 identified as Asian; and 1 participant identified as Dominican. In this sample, 15 out of the 18 participants identified as first-generation students. The names of all interviewees have been changed in order to protect their identity.

The data collection method utilized in this study was semi-structured interviews which consisted of both descriptive and reflective open-ended questions designed to give the interviewees the opportunity to explain their high school experience in depth and comment openly on how it impacted their preparation for college. In the interviews, participants discussed their coursework, extracurricular involvement, and employment in high school. In addition, the subjects described their college application process, their college coursework and their college employment. During the interview, the participants' responses were audio recorded so that they could be accurately transcribed. The transcribed data was then coded for key phrases and organized by theme for further analysis.

The research methods used in this study allow for the collection of descriptive and detailed information from participants. However, the data collected in the study is also limited because of the possibility of interviewer effect, because the personal contact that I had with a number of the participants could have influenced the data that was collected from their interviews. Other limitations in this study may include participants misunderstanding questions or misremembering past experiences, which can impact the data collected in qualitative interviews.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Statement 1: Students who were involved in extracurricular activities in high school will report feeling more prepared for the transition into college than those who did not report being involved in extracurriculars in high school.

Many interviewees remembered their involvement in high school extracurriculars as a support system which helped them significantly as they prepared for college. For Ben, from New Bedford, college became a reality for him as a result of his relationship with the Yearbook advisor. Ben explained that his advisor "really pushed [him] to go to college [because he] hadn't really thought about it much before that" (Ben, New Bedford HS). Similarly, Samantha, from New Bedford, recalled the Yearbook

advisor being “like a second mom” who helped her with everything from understanding financial aid to picking out college classes (Samantha, New Bedford HS). Both Ben and Samantha identify as first-generation college students, which meant that their family members were less able to offer advice about how to navigate the college application process. When family members were unable to assist, these high school mentors were an invaluable resource. The one-on-one relationships that club advisors often developed with the students in this study allowed them to share information about college and answer their students’ questions about college access and planning.

These findings mirror what Glater (2016) found in his research concerning the benefits of extracurricular activities. He argued that involvement in extracurricular activities in high school facilitated one’s success in college because students were able to build relationships with staff and faculty who could educate them about college expectations. Ben and Samantha’s reflections support what has been found in previous research and reinforces the important role mentorship plays for first-generation students specifically.

Three out of the 18 interviewees reported that they were not involved in any extracurricular activities offered by their high school. One interviewee, Ryan, did not feel adequately prepared for college, and, looking back, Ryan expressed that he was at a disadvantage because he was not heavily involved in high school extracurricular activities. He explained that he “did not take applying to college seriously. I applied to one college just because I looked it up. I did not even [do] other research” (Ryan, Brockton HS). Reflecting back, Ryan believed that if he had made more connections with the staff and faculty in his high school, he would have had more knowledge about different college opportunities. Furthermore, Ryan saw the benefits of extracurricular involvement when he enrolled at Massasoit Community College (MCC). Ryan reported that he “knew about internships because [he] was involved, [and] because [he] was talking to people. [He] knew about

opportunities.” (Ryan, Brockton HS). Ryan’s regret reinforces the important role that building relationships with high school faculty and staff has on a student’s preparation for college.

Ryan identifies as a first-generation student, and previous research has noted the importance of mentorship for first-generation students (Farmer-Hinton 2008; Holland 2009; Reid and Moore 2008). Ryan recognized after enrolling at MCC that building relationships with staff and faculty could provide him access to additional opportunities. In high school, Ryan did not get involved in extracurricular activities and he did not develop one-on-one relationships with the staff and faculty. As a result, he did not receive much advice or guidance through the college application process, and he did not know how to navigate it successfully. Farmer-Hinton (2008) notes that first-generation students often do not have enough information about college to successfully complete the college application process without the assistance of high school personnel, and Ryan’s reflections evidence a similar conclusion. Ryan regretted not being more involved in extracurricular activities while in high school, which reinforces the important role that the one-on-one relationships developed through clubs and organizations can have on students preparing for college.

Research Statement 2: Students who felt supported through the college application process by their guidance counselors and teachers will report feeling more prepared for higher education.

Subjects in this study viewed guidance counselors as important mentors who helped them to prepare for college. Many interviewees who identify as first-generation students noted the significant role that knowledgeable guidance counselors played in helping them apply for and prepare for college. First-generation student Jessica from Brockton explained that she went into the application process “completely clueless... because neither of [her] parents knew much about how to apply... So, it was all through [her] guidance counselor” (Jessica, Brockton HS). Because Jessica could not rely on her parents’ assistance in the application process, it was vital that knowledgeable guidance counselors were available

to educate her on how to apply for colleges, and how to navigate the process.

Liam from Brockton also reiterated the important role that guidance counselors play in helping students to prepare for college. Liam emigrated from Haiti as a child, and he also identified as a first-generation college student. Therefore, Liam was reliant on his high school to provide him information and support throughout the college application process. Liam explained that the application process was “nerve-wracking [because he had] never seen [an] application before. [The guidance counselor had to] help me with everything... [and] tell me what to do.” (Liam, Brockton HS). Liam reported feeling stressed by the college application process because he had never seen an application like it before, and he could not rely on his parents to provide him with any assistance. Liam’s gratitude towards his guidance counselor for supporting him through the application process evidences the integral role that high school staff play in preparing students for college.

Kim from Fall River fondly recalled activities that her guidance counselor planned to help prepare her and her peers for higher education. Kim explained that they were given a semester budget and with assistance from the guidance counselors, the students had to account for college expenses and decide how many hours in a week they would allocate for study and work. Kim also explained that “mandatory meetings” were set up between B.M.C Durfee students and academic advisors from Bristol Community College where students discussed “what applications we wanted to fill out and what GPA we needed to have” (Kim, B.M.C. Durfee HS). Kim remembered these activities and meetings as extremely helpful because they helped her to understand how to make college a reality and taught her how she could set herself up to succeed in higher education.

Other interviewees felt that they did not receive the support they needed from their high school guidance counselors. Without the proper mentorship, or knowledge about college from family members or high school staff, these students were easily

frustrated by the application process. Rachel, from Brockton, explained:

I didn’t know the questions that needed answers. I didn’t know [anything] about college because no one really spoke about college, and the application process or what you should be looking for ... And it was definitely overwhelming because I didn’t have that skill or that level of preparation to go into these applications and fill everything out correctly. (Rachel, Brockton HS)

Rachel was a first-generation student who relied on her high school to provide her with the information she needed about college. When guidance counselors and other high school staff failed to offer the support she needed, Rachel struggled to get through the application process and take full advantage of potential opportunities. Farmer-Hinton (2008) argues that first-generation students are able to achieve their academic goals with sufficient support from high school staff. However, when that support is lacking, first-generation students such as Rachel report experiencing a considerable amount of frustration.

Fiona from Taunton shared similar frustrations as she feels she could have made a more informed decision about what college to attend if she had received the proper support from her guidance counselors. She reported:

I didn’t know about any schools. As a senior, I was just like “I don’t even know where I want to go [and] I don’t know what I want to do.” Usually guidance counselors should be helping you [but]... I really didn’t have a sense of what schools were out there. (Fiona, Taunton HS)

As a first-generation student, she felt that she did not have enough information to make an informed decision about college, and she felt that the guidance counselors in her high school failed to provide

her the support that she needed. Conley (2008) argues that students should not only be academically prepared to succeed in college, but they also must have enough knowledge about college to truly understand the application process and choose a school that best fits their needs. Without the proper support from her guidance counselor, Fiona reported feeling frustrated by the application process and disappointed that she did not have enough information to make a more informed decision.

Finally, Nicole from Brockton resented her high school guidance counselor as she believes that her guidance counselor “messed up a lot with things [and] miss[ed] half the deadlines” (Nicole, Brockton HS). Nicole did not have any family members who had attended college, so she was dependent on her high school to provide her the information and support that she needed to make higher education a reality. Therefore, Nicole was infuriated when her guidance counselor’s negligence limited her opportunities. After high school, Nicole decided to enroll at Massasoit Community College in a “spur of the moment” decision because “it was the summer after [she] had graduated, and [she] still didn’t know where [she] was going” (Nicole, Brockton HS). When high school students are reliant on guidance counselors to send the proper paperwork to colleges, it is important that they are knowledgeable and organized enough to assist their students. When students lack that assistance, they often find themselves struggling to even get into college. Rachel, Fiona, and Nicole are all first-generation students, and Holland (2009) explains that first-generation students must depend on their high school for college preparation and guidance because they cannot utilize their parents as college resources. Therefore, it is imperative that high school staff are equipped to support their students through the college application process. Rachel, Fiona, and Nicole’s frustrations reinforce the important role that high school staff play for first-generation students who are reliant on them for support through the college application process.

Multiple interviewees also noted the important role that teachers played in helping them prepare for college. Beyond

providing them the necessary academic skills, many interviewees reported that their teachers would invest personally in assisting their students in the college application process. When asked who provided the most assistance during the college application process, Ben from New Bedford explained that “teachers...were the ones who were driving us towards ‘well, what are you going to do when you get out of here?’” (Ben, New Bedford HS). As a first-generation student, Ben did not see college as a possibility until high school. When his teachers, and other staff at the school, invested in him and challenged him to think about the future, he recognized his potential. Without the support of teachers and staff, Ben may not have chosen to pursue higher education. In response to the same question, Claire from New Bedford had a similar reflection. She reported “teachers who I had a close relationship with would sit down and talk to me about money and scholarships and what they thought would be best for me career-wise...I think that was the most influential” (Claire, New Bedford HS).

Farmer-Hinton (2008) also notes the importance of mentorship in assisting students in their preparation for college. In her research, Farmer-Hinton (2008: 133) explains that many students in her focus group reported the significant role that a specific “interested adult” played in helping them to recognize college as a possibility and guiding their college planning activities. The data collected in this study reinforces what previous research has shown: teachers who saw potential in their students and invested in helping them realize their academic goals were remembered by students for the positive impression that they had.

Research Statement 3: Students who took Honors and Advanced Placement classes as part of their high school coursework will report feeling more prepared than those who did not enroll in higher level classes.

Participants who enrolled in Honors and AP level classes in high school remembered how those advanced courses prepared them for college-level academics. Jessica from Brockton explains: “my AP teachers would always talk about college and

how important AP was because it could help us in college” (Jessica, Brockton HS). Jessica reported that she felt adequately prepared for college-level course work because she was exposed to college-level classes in high school and her teachers helped her to succeed at that level. Teachers who saw academic promise in their students, challenged them to rise to college-level standards, and explained the significance of completing advanced coursework in high school were remembered by the interviewees in this study for their important advice.

Allen from Brockton also remembered being challenged by Honors-level work as he commented that the work load was “intense,” but that he appreciated that “it really gave [him] a sense of how college would be” (Allen, Brockton HS). While challenging at the time, Allen appreciated that he took higher level classes in high school because the work was similar to what he would be asked to do in college. Ruth from Brockton reiterated a similar sentiment: “based off of what I had to do in high school, I was prepared [for] what I have to do in college. I know I can manage it because I’ve done something similar before” (Ruth, Brockton HS). Both Allen and Ruth felt that taking Honors-level courses was an important part of their preparation for college because the work load was similar to that of a college class. By exposing students to college level work in high school, these classes help to prepare students for the academic demands they will encounter in college.

Some interviewees regretted not taking their high school academics seriously. Kim from Fall River enrolled in AP classes, but she did not invest in them. She commented that her AP teachers “didn’t really stress how important it would be to pass the [AP] exams, and how it would help you in college” (Kim, B.M.C. Durfee HS). Because Kim did not understand the benefits that she could have received from her AP courses, she did not take the courses very seriously. Now that she is in college, she expressed regret as she recognized how much AP credits could have helped her academically. Kim explained that if she “would’ve known how

advanced [she] would’ve been, it would’ve helped [her]” (Kim, B.M.C. Durfee HS). Kim regrets not taking her AP classes seriously because she reports feeling as though she missed out on an opportunity to get ahead academically.

Other interviewees felt the repercussions of not investing in high school coursework when they got to college. Megan from New Bedford explained that “high school was very social” for her (Megan, Greater New Bedford Reg. Voc. Tech HS). She explained that she “did not pay attention and [she] did not like to do work” which is why she had to “go to a community college” because her “grades were not that great” (Megan, Greater New Bedford Reg. Voc. Tech HS). As a college student, Megan recognizes how her low grades in high school limited her collegiate opportunities. Kaitlyn from Brockton also faced challenges because she did not invest in her coursework in high school. She explained:

I was not your top notch student. If anything, I was lazy and I cut corners. When I brought that over to my college career, it was not cutting it... I got on academic probation my freshman year. (Kaitlyn, Brockton HS)

Kaitlyn struggled to keep up with college academic work because she did not invest in her high school coursework either. She explained that her lazy attitude prevented her from doing well in high school, and in college it got her into more serious trouble. Kaitlyn later elaborated, saying that if she had established better study skills in high school then she believes she would have performed better in her first year of college, and she would be happier with her overall GPA. Megan and Kaitlyn’s regret reinforces the important role that high school coursework can play in preparing students to transition to college level academics.

Research Statement 4: Students who were involved in college preparation organizations will report feeling more prepared to transition into college than those who did not join such organizations.

One key component of college preparedness is helping students to develop a clear understanding of what college entails. Glennie, Dalton, and Knapp (2015:963) argue that pre-college access programs provide students with the opportunities to “seek more information about college, apply to college and receive financial aid [than] non-participants.” These programs are typically designed to benefit first-generation students and low-income students who are in need of support and guidance when applying to and enrolling in college. When high schools offer these college preparation organizations, they provide their students with the opportunity to visit universities, receive academic, social, and financial assistance, and receive support through the application process (Glennie, *et al.*, 2015; Gullatt and Jan, 2003).

Dianne, from Brockton, reflected on her involvement in Brockton Talent Search, an organization that provided her academic assistance, as well as information about college applications and college life. Dianne described:

They have waivers to apply for college. They help with filling [out] the FAFSA. [They] give [school supplies], SAT Prep, college [tours] etc. [And] people that participate in the program that go to college can come and tell those high school students about their college experience, and what they should expect, what they should know (Dianne, Brockton HS).

Dianne recalled that her experience with Brockton Talent Search was instrumental in her preparation for college. Dianne is a first-generation immigrant, so she was reliant on her high school to provide her academic and social support so that she could get accepted and succeed in college. Dianne’s involvement in a college preparation program gave her the chance to visit colleges, learn more about college life, and receive assistance with the college research and application process.

Another college preparation organization that interviewees

from Fall River referenced was Upward Bound. Lawrence describes all that the organization provided students:

They would offer after-school tutoring sessions. And then during the summer, they select a college campus, and we would kind of see [what] it would be like to live on campus, and also at the same time, we were doing a lot of activities that were really preparing us for college. We had to do practice applications, filling out waivers... practice SATs, and we also were taking classes. At the senior level in high school, you were able to take a class that would count towards your [college] credit. (Lawrence, B.M.C. Durfee HS)

As Lawrence explained, Upward Bound offered a myriad of academic supports for their students. Lawrence commented later in the interview that a majority of the information that he learned about different college opportunities was through his involvement with Upward Bound. Gullatt and Jan (2003) explain that exposure to college campuses can be a crucial part of preparing a first-generation student for college as their experience on campus can help them envision themselves succeeding as a college student. For first-generation students who may not know anyone who has attended college, it is important for them to recognize that college is an attainable option for them, and these college preparation programs offer students the chance to see that.

Claire from New Bedford discussed how Gear Up, a college preparedness organization, “opened [her] eyes to many possibilities” for college (Claire, New Bedford HS). She explained that Gear Up focused on helping students:

Writing essays... applying to college...applying for SAT’s and prep SAT classes...[They] brought us on college tours... We had guest speakers from colleges and they’d bring back kids who graduated from New Bedford High who went to

college or graduated from college and just had them talk to us and they had people who didn't go to college and then later on in life went to college come back and talk to us... [and] they offered a scholarship. (Claire, New Bedford HS)

Hearing from college students helped Claire and her peers recognize that college was an option for them. The program educated her about the benefits of earning a college education and provided her the academic and financial support she needed to apply and be accepted into a university.

Looking back, some participants reported that while they may have been academically prepared for college, they lacked the social skills necessary for the high school to college transition. First-generation students especially noticed that they did not have the preparation they needed to succeed socially in this new college culture because their parents could not advise them. Beyond the application process, students also require support in preparing for the higher demands and expectations of college.

Liam from Brockton remembers that the staff at his high school "didn't really tell us what to expect, and what college was about" (Liam, Brockton HS). He explained the significance of understanding how to access college academic resources, as well as knowing how to converse with professors. While he felt that having these social skills was an important part of his academic success, Liam expressed that he did not learn about the social expectations of college until he had enrolled. Liam further explained that if he had received more information about college culture from his high school experience, he would have felt more prepared for the high school to college transition.

Ruth from Brockton shared a similar sentiment: "high schools would be better if they helped not just preparing [students for] school work, but help[ed] students with adapting to college life, and [had] more people come in to speak about it" (Ruth, Brockton HS). While a majority of the interviewees in this study felt that

their high school offered academic programs and application assistance which helped prepare them for college, some noted the lack of social support. First-generation students especially may not have an understanding of what college is like because they do not have family members who have attended college. Therefore, it is important that high schools work to prepare their students both academically and socially for the transition into college.

CONCLUSION

This research sought to understand whether or not Bridgewater State University students felt adequately prepared for college by their experience in an urban high school. Based on previous research, this study examined interviewees' involvement in extracurricular activities and college preparation organizations in high school, their high school course work, and their knowledge about the college application process as well as the overall culture of college as indicators of college preparedness (Conley 2008; Farmer-Hinton 2008; Gullatt and Jan 2003; Reid and Moore 2008).

The data collected in this study supports the hypothesis that those who are involved in clubs while in high school reported feeling more prepared for the transition into college than those who were not involved. Interviewees reported that their involvement in activities in high school facilitated their success in college because it gave them the opportunity to develop one-on-one relationships with club advisors who could serve as mentors in the college application process. This data reflects what previous research has found in terms of the mentoring role that high school staff and faculty can provide for first-generation students preparing for college (Farmer-Hinton 2008; Holland 2009; Reid and Moore 2008; Wimberly and Noeth 2004).

The second research statement that this study addressed was the importance of college knowledge for students who were preparing to transition into post-secondary education. Many of the first-generation students who participated in this study reported feeling frustrated and discouraged by the college application

process when they did not receive adequate assistance from their guidance counselors. Their frustrations reinforce the importance of mentorship as a path to collegiate success for first-generation students.

The third research statement that this study explored is the role that an individual's high school coursework played in their preparation for college. Interviewees who enrolled in Advanced Placement and Honors classes reported feeling academically prepared for college. Conley (2008) argues that study based skills and academic behaviors are an integral part of academic success in college; therefore, the data collected in this study mirrors the conclusions drawn in previous research.

Finally, this study sought to understand the role that college preparation organizations played in helping first-generation and low-income students transition to college. Previous research has shown that college preparation organizations are particularly beneficial for first-generation students as they provide them with the academic, social, and financial advice that they need to succeed in college (Glennie *et al.* 2015; Gullatt and Jan 2003). In this study, interviewees reported that all of these opportunities made college more attainable for them.

The data collected in this study confirms that college preparedness is a multifaceted concept that includes an individual's academic and social preparedness as well as their overall knowledge about the college application process and college culture. Previous research has argued that high schools are responsible for providing students with the college readiness resources that they need (Wimberly and Noeth 2004), and the interviewees in this study concurred. Therefore, the data collected from these interviews suggest that there should be additional investment in high schools' college preparation efforts. Specifically, high schools in urban areas with a high proportion of first-generation students should invest in providing their students with programs to educate them about college options and the college application process. All students should be knowledgeable about how to matriculate and succeed in

college and what steps need to be taken in high school to ensure that collegiate success is attainable.

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